The Relationship between Toponymy and Linguistics

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Abstract: Through this article I tried to point out that the toponymy of a region can be differently studied, given the concerns of the one conducting the research, thus the concern for toponymy must preocupy the geographer and historian but olso the linguist which aims to discover the origin of some names on purely linguistic criteria (of phonetic, semantic, onomasiologic nature and so on). The linguistic material (exemplified toponyms) obtained from field surveys (Upper Bistrița basin) and the study of specialised historical and geographical documents aims to capture relatively new concepts such as polarization and differentiation, presenting the meaning, etymology and changes occurring over time in the process of denomination of a reality. I also tried to capture the fact that common names and place names do not exclude each other, but are in a reciprocity relationship, despite some semantic, derivational and grammatical particularities.

Keywords: toponymy, linguistic, toponymic structures, entopic terms, appellations, anthroponyms.

Due to the fact that the study of place names uses research results from various fields such as linguistics, geography, history, ethnography, sociology, archeology, economics and do on, toponymy may be considered a border area, located at the intersection of several disciplines. In this case, both methods of investigation

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and the results of mentioned fields are important, so that investigations so far have shown that onomastics (toponymy included) cannot be considered an independent science, but is a branch of linguistics. Regarding this aspect, Al. Graur said that names of places and people "are a bit of tradition and history of the country, they provide information about the culture and the way of life in general, of those who have preceded us."[1] Because toponymy deals with the study of the origin, of the meaning and evolution of place names in a given language, and also of geographical names, it is interesting not only for geographer and historian, but also for linguist and philologist. At the same time, since human speech is directly related to its culture, we can investigate the evolution of language, the origin of words, meaning and evolution of their meaning, and also the most valuable results about the evolution of people's culture that speaks it. Knowing that for Romanian language the first written documents in Romanian dates only from the sixteenth century, toponymy is interesting for philologist in particularly, this giving him the chance to find out what people have visited and settled in our territory. There is a close relation between toponymy and social psychology of a nation because accurate knowledge of place names is very important, having that, through individualization in ancient times to designate surrounding realities (geographical, social, historical, and so on). From this point of view is very important for linguistic the study of changing place names from a historical epoch to another in terms of phonological development, morphological changes, changes of meanings and also possible extinctions, translations, substitutions and overlapping of terms. Regarding the knowledge of the history of peoples or regions, toponymy can provide important conclusions. Regarding the vocabulary of the language spoken years ago or the vocabulary of dialects and speech, place names serve both for toponymy and dialectology, helping thus, together with his-

[1] Al. Graur, *Nume de locuri [Place Names]*, Editura Ştiinţifică, 1972, Bucureşti, p. 10.

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tory and archeology, the knowledge or reconstruction of earliest stages of the past history of the people and Romanian language.

As far as the **linguists** are concerned, they have dealt with setting the etymology of place names, so that place names have the same interest as words from ordinary lexicon. Even if we talk about history or "mirroring" the environment from a geographical point of view to determine the etymology of place names, all professionals should appeal to linguistic research that studied toponyms, especially to determine their origin on phonetic, semantic, morphological, syntactic or onomasiologic criteria. Place names evolve over time, as evidenced by their linguistic structure. In this case, being a form of language, a place name must be studied as such, and this form must be reported to a threefold plan, consisting of: **object named-meaning** (toponymic meaning) – **form**.

Throughout the whole historical development of geographic denomination and in the stage of naming we see involved social psychology, popular notions, the original and individual way of naming the surrounding reality, interpersonal relationships and stages of society's development, so that they are also involved in the evolution of language as they obey the evolutionary laws at phonetic, morphological, lexical, derivative and syntactic level.

As language, toponymy works synchronic and evolves diachronic. **Synchronically**, because exists only in relation with human society and its history, toponymy represents a linguistic picture of o regions' history, so that each geographical naming is the history expressed by the laws of language. Also, the synchronic research highlights the appearing opportunities of toponyms at this stage, involving an analysis of the relationships between the components, the way and joint sequence in forming words. However, not all toponyms are current appearances, because many of them are considerable old and often ancient toponyms contain elements that do not exist in the current language or are made by principles currently unknown. For this reason a **diachronic** approach is necessary for topic name forming and in toponymy, the diachronic aspect is included in the

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origin and evolution of a place name. Under a diachronic aspect are studied toponyms that have lost the morphological touch with basic words and the structure of these names is determined after an etymological analysis. Diachronic study of a place name also implies, on the one hand, the temporal analysis of the changes in the designation report and on the other hand, the research of reports determined successively between that toponym and other toponyms denoting elements of a geographical or socio-geographic given complex.

To illustrate the fact that toponymy works synchronically and evolves diachronically I chose the toponym *Obcina Bătrână/ Old Obcina*. This is a descriptive toponym, describing a high hill located in the east of Țibău brook. The structure of this toponym is a phrase consisting of entopic *obcina* and adjectival determinant *bătrână/old*. Regarding the diachronic approach, we can say that *obcina* toponym is mentioned in documents or maps from fifteenth century.

Etymologically speaking, the appellation *obcină* < sl. *občina*, "mountainous or hilly ridge, smooth, rounded where from place to place there are gentle peaks and who joins two peaks; common slope forming the boundary between two properties); p.ext. (reg) "ridge, elongated ridge of hills or mountains (with a height of 1000-1500 m) joining two peaks and on which rise from place to place, peaks not too high; high place covered by forest" (DEXI 1288); name of mountain, especially in northern Moldova (Iordan, *TR*, 456). Evolutionary, the *obcină* appellation refers to an original meaning very special and important in terms of social-economic < see. Slv. *obştina* "community", which also appears in other Slavic languages: bg. *obšččina*, Czech. *občina*, Russian. *obšččina,* Serbian. *opština* "common property" (Iordan, TR, 522); *obcină, opcină* in Western and Northern Moldavia "hill or mountain ridge that separates two valleys and forms the boundary between the estates of villages from the two valleys" (Petrovici, *Studies*, 1970, 189) < sl. *občina*, according to ucr. *Opčina,* name of a mountain, Russian, *občina* "common property".

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Alongside with *obcină* form, the *opcina* form is met, both in elders speaking and in the old geographical dictionaries of Suceava county, meaning "smooth ridge with road up to the top" (Homorodean, *FL*., in S. C. L., 1987, no. 4, 271-297). Another version of *obcina* toponym is *otcina*, that appears in a document from 1820, with the form *La Otcina Flocească* (Balan, *NDC*, 92-93).

Cataloging *obcina* toponym and its derivatives, I. Iosep found a number of 241, of which 133 in Northern Moldavia and Bucovina and 108 in Transylvania. (*Bucovina Museum Yearbook*, XVII-XIX, 1989-1990 Suceava 1993, 157). Atributive determinant *bătrână/old* suggests the oldness of these heights.

Bătrân/old, -ă < lat. *veteranus* (CIH., *D.*, I, 24; Şăineanu, *D.*, II, 133); see. lat. *veteranus* „old soldier" (TIK., *D.*, I, 181); lat. *veteranus* „old, elder" after *vetus, veteris* „long living" (Scriban, *D.*, II, 133); lat. *veteranus* „veteran" (DLR, t. I1, fsc. I, 528); lat. *betranus, veteranus* (CAN., *D.*, 134); lat. *betranus, -a, -um* = *veteranus* (DEXI, 207).

Although there are differences from one period and one region to another, we can establish inside toponymy not only **layers**, but also **structures (toponymic fields).** Through the stratification of toponyms we can determine the component layers of toponymy of an area or of the whole country. Depending on its age, the most important layer belongs to native people, indigenous, and over it overlapped other layers, newer ones, which the historian and linguist must define and explain[2]. The stratification of toponyms facilitates the establishment of Dacia's heritage, and after that of the Roman heritage, names given by Romanians over time, aspects of Romanians living together with other ethnic groups (some assimilated by Romanians, others continuing to live together and near Romanians), so that one can draw the conclusion that toponymic majority of a region is of Romanian origin. Most toponyms have as starting point some appellatives naming

[2] Ilie Dan, *Aspecte ale toponimiei româneşti, cu privire specială asupra Văii Solonețului[Aspects on Romanian Toponymy, especially on Solonet Valley]*, AUI, 1970, p. 105.

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soil configuration (*Bâtca Netedă/Smooth Slope* – Cb.), shape (*Vârful Rotund/Round Peak* – Cb.), location (*Dosul Muntelui/ Behind the Mountain* – Ib.), color (*Piatra Roşie*/*Red Stone* – Cb.); appellations which have as starting point different facts from the social life of our people (*Tătarca/Tartarian, Rusaia/Russian*); appellations that preserve memories of events and happenings from the past (*La Tranşee/At the Trenches*); appellations which betrays a certain attitude or mental trait of those who gave them.

Referring to **toponymic structures** and their evolution we can capture a toponymic approach from linguistic perspective. In this case, the use and understanding of the meanings of words may depend on the quality of our perceptions and concepts and toponyms from an area means knowing it and orientation inside it because they have a role of designation, but in the same time they may form to some extent a description of the area, of what struck the eye and remained in the collective memory.

Another aspect to be investigated is the one referring to polarizing term and to its influence over toponymic structures. Where an analysis and delimitation is desired in a geographic mix, the denominator chooses a **toponymic core** called **polarizer** (**Suhard**, mountain) that will attract around him other geographical categories (stream - *Pârâul Suhărzel*/*Suhărzel Stream*, peak – *Vârful Suhărzel/Suhărzel Peak*, ridge - *Culmea Suhard*/*Suhard Ridge*, realm – *Plaiul* Suhard/Suhard Realm, body – *Trupul Suhărzel/Suhărzel Body* a.s.o.) such that all items listed will be called in relation to the dominant geographical object. Thus, once established, toponyms can become forming basis for other topical names, meaning that from a mountain other realities in close proximity can take the name, forming a toponymic field, a combination of two or more toponyms, formed around a base toponym (core), which functions as the polarizing centre[3]. In this case, if the establishment of category (oiconim, hydronym, oronym, fitonym and so on) and of the type of the toponym (descriptive or

[3] Mircea Ciubotaru, *Oronimia şi hidronimia din Bazinul Superior al Bîrladului [Horonymy and Hydronymy of the Upper Birlad Basin]*, Editura "Demiurg", Iaşi, 2001, p. 15.

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personal) represents the syncronic perspective, the representation of the developed toponymic field is the diachronic study of the whole place names in the region.

In this situation the designation turns into identification, converting the appellation into proper name, resulting thus a common name for several geographical categories. In toponymy we use evocative words, geographical realities, objects from the same category: hill, cliff, creek, and what is achieved throughout toponymic polarization phenomenon is a grouping of several geographical objects around a single one, dominant in social and geographical terms. The processes leading to toponymic fields are polarization and differentiation. *Polarization* is the "concentration of toponymic denomination of a geographically well-defined aggregate well marked around a polar name, generally corresponding to the element of maximum socio-geographical importance"[4].

Thus, from the name of Magura hamlet, other toponyms were formed which designate geographical elements near by: *Muntele Măgurii/Mount Măgura, Dealul Măgurii/Măgura Hill, Vârful Măgurii/Măgura Peak, Pârâul Măgura/ Măgura Brook, Drum forestier Măgura/Măgura forest road.* In the structure of secundary toponyms, the primary toponym is the determinant and the entopic (*muntele/mountain, dealu/hilll, vârful/peak, pârâul/brook, drumul/road*) are the determined element. The second phenomenon that leads to toponymic fields is *differentiation*, that is "the process of designating, using lexical delimiters, parts of a named geographical object"[5]. For example, between *Botoş* and *Botoşelul* there is a privative opposition, obtained with the help of diminutival suffixation (*Botoş* - main course and *Botoşel* - main tributary). To illustrate the formation of toponyms through the processes of polarization and differentiation, I will develop the toponymic field performed around the toponym Ţiganii /Gypsies:

[4] Dragoş Moldovanu, *Principii ale lexicografiei toponimice[Principles of toponymic lexicography]*, in ALIL, XXIII, 1972, p. 81.

[5] *Ibidem*, p.141.

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ȚIGANII / GYPSIES personal toponym 1. Oronym (Preceded by entopic *vârf/peak*, in heterofunctional phrase) Height situated to the North of Dealul Măgurii /Măgura Hill between Pârâul Rusaia/Russian Brook and Pârâul Măgurii/Măgura Brook, originated from Pârâul Țiganii de Sus/Upper Gypsies Brook and țiganii de Jos/Bottom Gypsies Brook. *Vârful țiganilor/Gypsies Peak.* According to drawing directory plans 1953.

a) Through polarization Hydronim (Preceded by the entopic *pârâu/brook*, in prepositional phrase, with *de sus*/*upper* determinant) Right tributary of the Bistrița Aurie/Golden Bistrita river, which arises from the Gypsy peak, downstream of Rusaia Stream. *Upper Gypsies Brook.* According to drawing directory plans 1953

b) Through differentiation Hydronim (Preceded by the entopic *pârâu*/*brook* in prepositional phrase with *de jos/bottom* determinant) tributary of the Bistrița Aurie/Golden Bistrita river, which arises from the Gypsy peak, downstream of Upper Gypsies Brook. *Bottom Gypsies Brook* According to drawing directory plans 1953

- Ethim.: the name is motivated by the fact that around 17 DN(national road), between the two streams came near by and were always stopping for a few days bands of gypsies which were selling their goods and after that they were leaving. ANCH. Cârlibaba.

The history of place names helps elucidate some aspects from the history of people and its language, important being in this respect the names that keep long lost linguistic features of spoken language. In this case, the toponymists should seek similarities and differences between how toponyms are formed (derivation and compounding) and how common names are formed taking into account the lexical-semantic, phonetic, morphological or syntactic criteria. Thus, in the case of **derivatives**, we must highlight the theme and toponymic affixes, while **semantic** aspects mainly concern the era where place names appear with toponymic function, especially when the link between the toponym and object named weakens. In this case we can explain the passing of river names on villages, mountains, meadows or farm-

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land. It is the case for descriptive toponym *Şesuri/Plains,* when from the name of *Şesuri Stream* toponyms were formed that designate geographical objects in the immediate vicinity of this stream: *Podul Şesuri/Şesuri Bridge, Cătunul Şesuri/Şesuri Hamlet*, *Piciorul Şesului/Şesuri Leg*, *Vârful Piciorul Şesului/Şesuri Leg Peak*, *Stâna Şesuri/Şesuri Sheepfold*. The main means of forming place names is derivation with suffixes. In toponymy suffixes have local value, personal, patronymic, and the productivity and frequency of these suffixes are different from one historical epoch to another, as their area of spread is not the same for all.

From the above we can conclude that the study of phonetics and semantics is crucial to toponymy though in semantics are met numerous difficulties in finding primary meaning of the toponym or "the toponymised appellative meaning and quality of denoted" overlaps[6]. Some difficulties are due to the fact that meaning of toponym is related to the referent, framed in a certain geographical category. In this case we must specify the nature of the relationship between a linguistic sign (proper name) and the object named by it. There are times when linguistic analysis of the toponym enables the knowing of an appellation with an original meaning, disappeared nowadays, using the etymological criteria. In order to establish an etymology, we must know not only the form but also the meaning of the word. Thus, if the meaning of a name is clear, its origin is easily to establish, but if the meaning does not appear by itself, studies must be conducted in order to discover which was the primitive value of the word or what was the concrete detail that started when setting the name.

Thus, the linguistic analysis of place names relates to four parts, namely phonetics, morphology, word formation and lexical.

Researching the toponymy of an area, there are two types of terms: entopic terms and appellations and toponyms itself.

[6] Dragoş Moldovanu, *Legile formative ale toponimelor româneşti cu radical antroponimic*. I. *Formații de plural[Formative Laws of Romanian Toponyms with Antroponymic Radical.* I. *Plurals]*, in „Anuarul de lingvistică şi istorie literară" [Linguistics and Literar History Yearbook], XXI, 1970, pp. 15-47.

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1) **Entopic terms** and **appellations** represent the actual image of depicted region. The most important source for Romanian toponymy are the terms in common language, called appellations. Toponyms are at their origin common names that due to specialized usage received individualizing features, distinguishing themselves from common names. However, we must take into account the fact that place names, even if vocabulary items, cannot be confused with common names, because they imply some specific features different from those of appellation, among which designating function is the most important. This feature is more evident in place names who's appellation from where originally started can't be found easily, and in some cases not at all. The topic denomination process has been in close contact with people's life that lived in a certain region, as reflected in the language of speakers who have lived or live in that territory[7], and so, a thorough knowledge of local dialect in a given area is very important for correct interpretation of the phenomena encountered in toponymy. In terms of etymology, the appellations that stand at the origin of many place names are of various origin, and we must admit that in the speech of a region have circulated in the same time both the appellation and name the topic name formed from it. Therefore Iorgu Iordan concluded that place names "should be treated the same as lexical items themselves, so as Romanian words in the strict sense."[8]. They can belong both to the common vocabulary, with well-defined semantic field and to toponymy, in a certain degree. However, appellations have a precise meaning, a character, content and an area of usage, which means that it **signifies** and **designates**. In the upper basin of Bistrița Aurie/ Golden Bistrița there were identified many place names derived from appellations, being used today in the local vocabulary: arşița/heat, balta/swamp, bahna/bahn, bâtca/slope, bobeica/peak, ciung/cut, coasta/coast, corhana/slope, creasta/crest, dealul/the hill, drumul/the road, fundoaia/the end, gura/mouth, iezer/tarn,

[7] Iorgu Iordan, *Toponimia românească [Romanian Toponymy]*, Editura Academiei, Bucureşti, 1963, pp. 8-10.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 7.

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jgheab/gutter, mal/shore, măgură/hill, muncel/hillock, obcina/ ridge, pârâul/the brook, pădurea/the forest, piscul/the peak, plaiul/ the leap, stâna/the sheepfold, vârf/summit and so on.

2) **The actual toponyms** which are a result of the above-mentioned process. In the toponymisation process it interferes the difference between the semantic content of the two names, appellation and toponymic. Unlike the appellation, which always has a well-stated meaning, the toponym loses the first meaning in time, reaching a point with no lexical meaning, the only feature still remaining being the one of identifying a specific territorial reality, that is the designation function. Thus, while appellations have a meaning and designates different objects, the corresponding toponym, after becoming proper name, won't designate but an individual determined object.

Place names included from the beginning two very important elements:

– **the generic element** that refers to the form of relief, hydrographic or orographic phenomenon: hill, mountain, plain, river and so on.

– **the specific element** through which geographical reality is distinguished (by description and by reference to a person or a social-historical fact: *High* Hill, *Țibău* Mountain, *Golden Bistrita* River and so on. Since proper names are subject to the same rules in their evolution just like appellations, in specialists' opinion there are a number of parallels between the evolution of toponyms and appellations.

An important category of place names, together with appellations, of borrowings from other languages and Romanian creation being based on common names, it is the one that are only personal. As in appellation-place name relationship, there is a mutual relation between toponyms and **anthroponyms**, reciprocity proved by the fact that a number of toponyms are formed from the name of a person.

The relationship between place names and the name of people in Romanian toponymy, both linguistically and historically, and in the diachronic and synchronic one, looks at the

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oldness and the spread of specialized suffixes in the name of Romanian localities[9]. Thus, researches have showed that the oldest and most common spread specialized suffixes in forming names of Romanian localities are *–eşti* and *-eni*[10] (Ciocăneşti, Iacobeni), and the causes for high productivity of these suffixes in toponymy are of historical and social nature. As demonstrated by Iorgu Iordan, the suffix *–eşti* indicates the personal origin of the inhabitants, and the suffix *–eni (-ani)* is specialized in showing local origin. Historical evidences are of great interest to demonstrate the oldness of localities in *–eşti,* allowing in this case the following of their evolution in time, but also establishing the differences between Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania. In this respect, we can conclude that place name that appeared after a person's name is the most important group in the social-historical toponymy, together with names of nations, professional and oiconymic ones[11].

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the current system of proper names has kept in itself, up to now, old of regional forms of some Romanian or foreign appellations, took from languages that came into contact with various makers whose meaning sometimes overlapped over Romanian makers meaning which took for itself and used to express human relationships, has cleverly combined some elements belonging to different languages and so on.

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